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World, media enveloped in sea of news pollution

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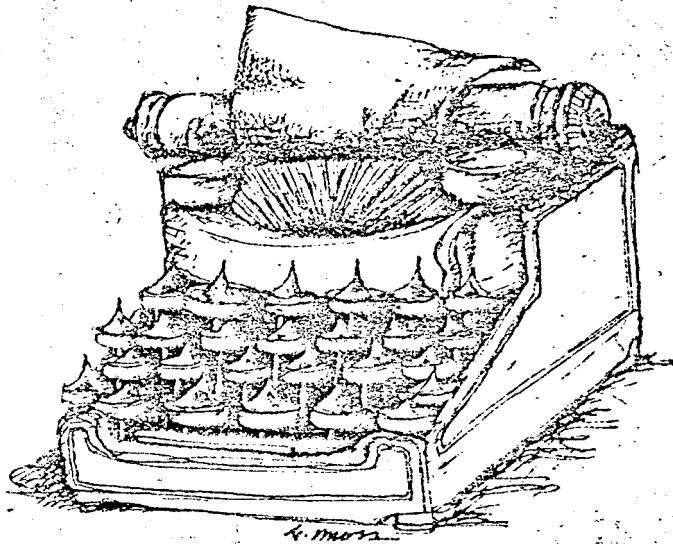
Central Intelligence Agency Director George Bush refused to answer when he was asked, during his appearance as American Society of Newspaper Editors luncheon speaker Apr. 8, whether the CIA maintains "relationships" with journalists working for foreign news media. Bush said a response would reveal intelligence "sources and methods."

The question Bush ducked was answered two weeks later by the Senate Intelligence Committee. The committee reported that the CIA maintains ties to a number of persons associated with U.S. media organizations and "a network of several hundred foreign individuals around the world who provide intelligence for the CIA and at times attempt to influence foreign opinion through the use of covert propaganda. These individuals provide the CIA with direct access to a large number of foreign newspapers and periodicals, scores of press services and news agencies, radio and television stations, commercial book publishers, and other foreign media outlets."

The statement is italicized in the committee's report. A footnote explains that italicized material "has been substantially abridged at the request of the executive agencies." Even cropped and touched up, the picture of the CIA that emerges is of an agency ready, willing and able to employ a large-scale covert propaganda apparatus to pollute the news media.

And not only the foreign media. A former CIA official told the Senate committee: "There is no way in this increasingly small world of ours of insulating information that one puts out overseas and confining it to the area to where one puts it out. . . . If you plant an article in some paper overseas . . . there is no way of guaranteeing that it is not going to be picked up and published by the Associated Press in this country."

The CIA's propaganda activities include the use of "black propaganda" — propaganda that appears to originate from an unfriendly source. Because U.S. policy makers could be misled by these phony stories, "senior U.S. officials" are informed of their true source. But as the Senate committee noted, "no mechanism exists to protect the U.S. public and the Congress from fallout from black propaganda or any other propaganda."



Russian and other foreign intelligence agencies employ similar covert propaganda tactics. Does the KGB have American newsmen on its payroll planting stories in the U.S. news media? Conceivably it does, though a Senate committee staff member who is familiar with the CIA's covert propaganda operation said he doubted that the Russians are planting stories in this country directly through U.S. newsmen, because the number and variety of U.S. media outlets would make it difficult to have an impact. He added that the Russians unquestionably have an extensive covert propaganda apparatus abroad.

An appendix to the Senate committee report, which apparently was contributed by the CIA, describes a KGB depart-

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